

# **God's an astronaut. Oz is over the rainbow, and Midian is where the monsters live.**

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

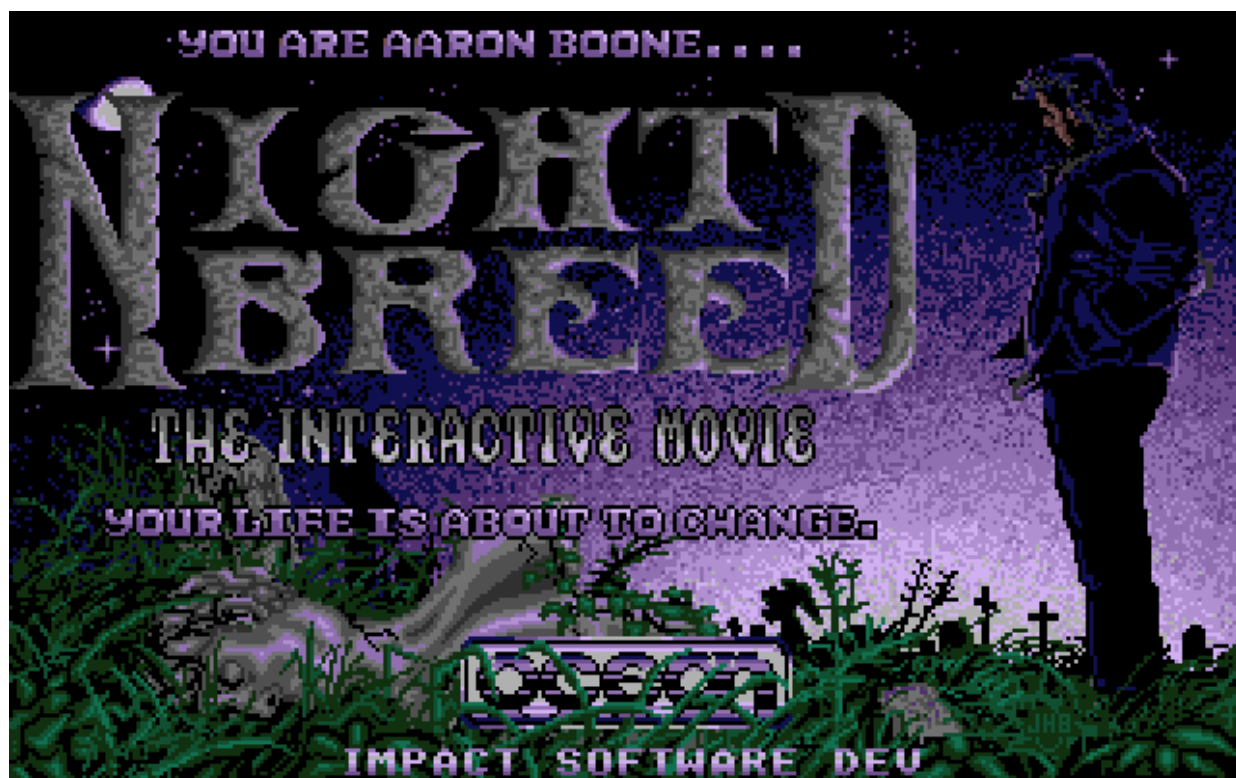
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You're not suffering from *deja vu*, we *have* been here before, visited the underworld freak show and bought the blood-drenched Nightbreed t-shirt from the gift shop. *Two* licensed games were produced on behalf of Ocean in 1990 to accompany Clive Barker's bat-guano-crazy fantasy-horror novel/movie.

I just covered the 'action' game previously, assuming that was the more exciting interpretation. I was wrong; both the platformer and 'interactive movie' that featured in the Amiga 500 'Screen Gems' pack (yours for £399.99) are similarly disheartening efforts, despite all the furore concerning visits to Pinewood Studios, shadowing the cast and crew during their development. I'm only returning to them now because... because... well I suppose it will serve as a stub to link to my movie-game comparison videos, which are worth watching if only to save you having to play the Cinemaware wannabe for yourselves. It's purgatory if I'm honest, accidentally appropriate as that may be.



## **Ocean's latex license**

"After Red Heat, The Untouchables and Batman: The Movie, Ocean has acquired its fourth film license of the year. Currently being shot at Pinewood Studios, Nightbreed is the cinema adaptation of Clive 'Hellraiser' Barker's best-selling fantasy novel Cabal.

So far only 40 per cent of the movie (which stars David Cronenberg) has been filmed but its already being described as the biggest ever 'creature' movie with over 200 monsters, and promises some spectacular make-up special effects. Impact Software, the team behind Run The Gauntlet, has already started work on the game, a multi-level mix of different gameplay styles, and has already paid visits to Pinewood to watch filming in progress. Ocean claims that this is one of the first film tie-ins where the software publisher has total co-operation from the film's producer, in this case 20th Century Fox.

Ocean hopes to have Nightbreed finished in time for a Christmas release - to coincide with the UK premiere of the movie."

## **The One news snippet (issue 8, May 1989)**

A third adaptation - an Ultima style RPG under development by Imagitec - was initially proposed, though fell by the wayside in light of the movie's poor reception at the box office. Maybe I'll review that one day too, just for closure's sake. I'm sure it'll work out fine, even if I have to make it up as I go along. In fact, I may not have to; Games that Weren't believe the WIP game code went on to drive Imagitec's 1993 DOS game, Daemongate.



*OK, I confess, I added the text myself. Please don't report me to Chief Eigerman.*



Several games inspired by Clive Barker's Hellraiser novel/movie were also cancelled in the '90s. They would have spanned various genres and platforms, with multiple developers responsible for their creation. Hard evidence supports some of the proposals, others merely rumours.

'Interactive movie' is somewhat over-egging the pudding. Impact Software's offering comprises a number of elementary sub-games that must be tackled in sequential order to succeed, loosely bound by the movies' off-the-wall narrative. Should you be curious, Impact's back-catalogue - other than



the two Nightbreed games - consists of Run the Gauntlet, and... erm... oh well, at least that was on the whole well-received...

"Ocean have certainly done a great job bringing Run the Gauntlet to our screens, and any sports sim fan after an action-packed game should definitely look this up."

**Computer and Video Games (82%, May 1989)**



To be fair, pre-Amiga they developed more games for the 8-bit platforms under the guise of 'Painting By Numbers', or as individual employees of Gremlin.

In the interactive movie's defence, it *does* evoke more of the cult-favourite celluloid than the action game, which kicks off in the Metropolis graveyard above 'hell on earth'. A covert mausoleum-like sanctuary for all manner of hideous monsters known as Midian.



"Believed to be responsible for a series of murders, Aaron Boone hears of a wonderful place called Midian; a place where a race of supernatural beings live, isolated from the inhumanities of man. In a bid to escape the unjust world, Boone discovers this underground Necropolis, hoping to be accepted as one of these creatures, the 'Breed'. However, this ambition becomes fulfilled in a nightmarish fashion, as he gets bitten by Peloquin, a cannibalistic Breed member, and thus undergoes an incredible transformation.





*'Better red than dead' - an anti-communism mantra popularised in the '50s during the McCarthy era.*



Unwittingly, Boone leads the police department to Midian. In a civilisation where everything that is different must be destroyed, these 'Sons Of The Free' mount an enormous attack upon the underground city, aided by 'The Mask' - the true serial killer whom Boone had been mistaken for.

Will Boone have caused the downfall of the Nightbreed, or can he become their saviour?

A combination of strategy elements and arcade-style action makes this a game of uncompromising challenges, varying every time it is played."



In contrast to the action game, the interactive alternative begins where the movie does; in Doctor Decker's office in consultation with the psychopathic psychiatrist otherwise known as 'The Mask'.



Decker's closet forte is serial-killing, pinning the crimes on patients who conveniently happen to be suffering from mental health conditions, thus are easier to manipulate with medication and nefarious suggestions planted via hypnotherapy. Schizophrenia diagnosee, Aaron Boone, is the perfect sitting duck patsy. Swapping his lithium psychotropics for LSD likely won't improve his chances of

recovery. Lithium probably wouldn't either, but as it's approved by the DSM we have to pretend it's useful.



Boone: You don't understand! I've killed people. Fifteen people.

Peloquin: Who told you that?

Boone: What do you mean?

Peloquin: He lied, Asshole! He lied. You're a Natural. And means...you're meat for the Beast.



Convinced he's responsible - and threatened with exposure by Decker - Boone sets off to seek 'professional help' at the local hospital. This entails making a car journey through Calgary's scenic woodland. It's an uneventful short trip in the movie, whilst the game exaggerates its significance, transforming it into the first of our mini-game challenges.





Employing the mouse or keyboard we must click on the road junctions to travel to that location, all the while managing our limited fuel supply. This can be replenished at the petrol (not *gas* because that would float away) station seen in the movie where Decker stops to interrogate the eccentric clerk as to the whereabouts of Midian. Ask him nicely and he might repair our car while we're filling up.





Totally at random we encounter police roadblocks where we're given the option to ram or evade in order to continue our wayfaring jaunt. Surging through them may save time, pierce the car's fuel tank (bullets will do that), cause a tire blowout or crumple our vehicle irrecoverably. The more damage sustained the less successful we can expect to be at blitzing through future barricades.



Again the outcome amounts to potluck. Should we be apprehended Boone ends up in the asylum - a *hospital* in the movie that occasionally plays host to some extremely disturbed patients. That's bound to happen.





We can also choose to deliver ourselves to the police station with the same result. Something you'll only do once since you'll subsequently know the police station is a police station. It's not labelled in any way you see.

Not to worry, Boone soon breaks out, giving us the opportunity to try again to reach the hospital. Most mistakes lead to our death so this is an early example of leniency. Make the most of it.



Arrive at the hospital and we meet Narcisse; the nutter who tears his own skin off to reveal his true identity believing "there's a face beneath this face". Narcisse is the key to locating Midian, as vague as his directions are. Failed by 'The System', this mysterious underground utopia of his dreams is the driving force Boone believes has the power to absolve him of his sins. Next stop Median. A tedious affair, this trudgingly torpid driving interlude only exists to link the various sub-games and pad out the hollow package.

"Creating an interactive movie is no easy task - it took pioneer Cinemaware years to get the formula right. Nightbreed's single biggest flaw is the fact that there's really only one way to play it. The inflexible order in which the sections are arranged means that there's no real freedom of choice and as such not many different ways to play.

In fairness, most of the small sub-games which lead to the entry into Midian aren't particularly impressive, but once you get underground the pace picks up. The Dungeon Master-style exploration works well, with the beat 'em up sections providing welcome spots of active relief. And while visually it fails to inspire, the sensible use of sampled sound generates a suitable atmosphere.

It's a pity that it's a little too much like a movie with its linear construction. It's entertaining for the first few interactions, but it's questionable how many times you want to sit through it again."

### **The One (75%, October 1990)**



Arriving at the graveyard gates we have a choice of three pathways. In the movie some views of this scene were actually constructed using matte paintings courtesy of Ralph McQuarrie. Stylishly atmospheric, although glaringly unreal

in retrospect. Ever tried to run through a canvas? Exploring the grounds we stumble into a police sting. Decker lies, announcing that we're armed with a gun, instructing the police to open fire to quash the threat. Taking him at his word, they do. We don't play any part in this incident, it's a cut scene that lands us in the morgue.



Dr Philip K. Decker: (to Boone) I believe you.

Dr Philip K. Decker: (to Law Enforcement)

(shouts) Dr Philip K. Decker: He's got a gun!





*Who'd ever suspect master of the macabre, David Cronenberg?*



Detective Joyce: (shouts) Fire!

Detective Joyce: Where's the gun?

Dr Philip K. Decker: (Shakes head) ... He reached into his jacket.



As a human, we die and stay dead. Transformed into one of the Nightbreed it's only a matter of time before we're resurrected, bound for a return to Midian.

As in the movie, we must be bitten by Peloquin before even attempting this route. Otherwise, as a human outsider, we're unceremoniously eaten by the Berzerkers.



Kinski: (having captured Boone) If we eat him, we break the law!

Peloquin: Oh, f\*\*k the law! I want meat!



To succumb to Peloquin's metamorphic gnashers we must enter the graveyard, have a bit of a chinwag and then leg it as he gives chase. This bit we *can* control, albeit only the speed at which we run. The idea is to whack the mouse button in synchrony with Boone's arm-swings, only it's much more reliable to just mash it continuously, or assign the command to a joystick's auto-fire function if playing via an emulator.



*Our Mini-me avatars draw closer and closer,  
until... "Sometimes when we touch, the honesty's too  
much..."*





*"...and I have to close my eyes and hide. I want to hold you till I die. Till we both break down and cry."*

*Doze off before reaching the exit gate and our neck sustains a messy leak.*

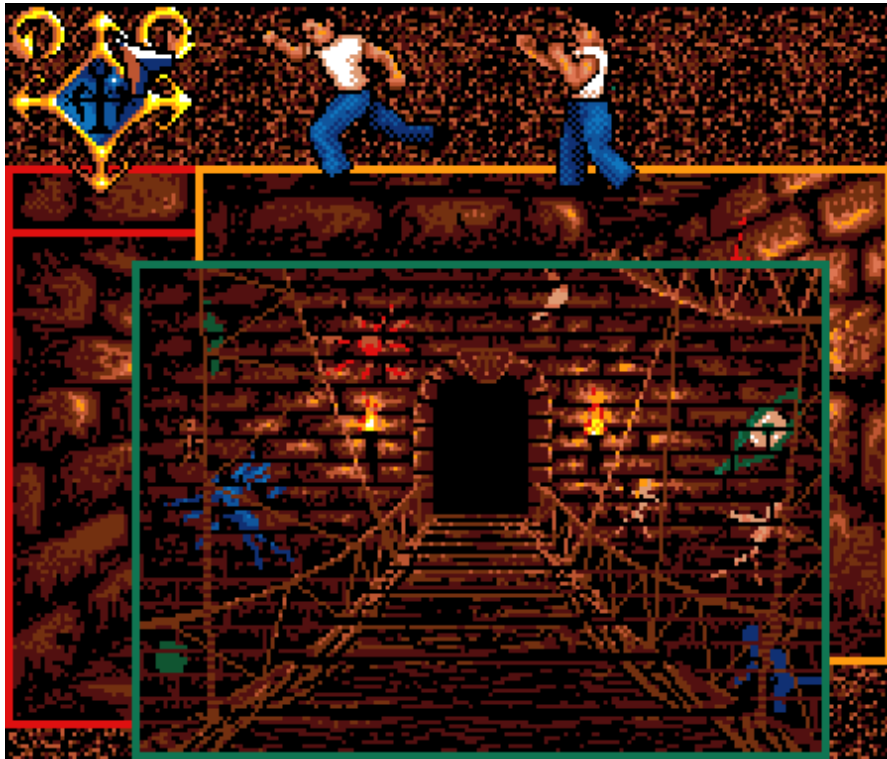
Rachel: To be able to fly, to be smoke, or a wolf? To know the night and live in it forever? That's not so bad. You call us 'monsters,' but when you dream, you dream of flying, and changing, and living without death. You envy us, and what you envy...

Lori Desinger: ...We destroy.



Wisely astute words from Lori Winston (Aaron's girlfriend) played by Anne Bobby. If you're into silly computer games you may also be interested to know that she went on to become the voice of Brigid Tenenbaum in the BioShock series.

Return to the graveyard later and we're confronted by a knife-wielding Decker. Our task here is to evade his finite supply of throwing daggers. We have no way to defend ourselves so must settle for riding out the onslaught by jerking about the screen with crazed mouse movements.



*This is where Decker would appear for the second time if I'd got that far. It's largely a repeat of the first incident except that expired time is represented by the bridge's fraying rope supports.*

Lylesberg: Aaron Boone... the Tribes of the Moon embrace you!



Once converted we're no longer innocent 'meat' and so are free to join the Nightbreed in Midian. Following Lylesberg's induction ceremony we're untouchable ...ish. Incidentally, why would Moses need gills? Never-mind, Doug Bradley is better known for his performance as 'Pinhead' in the first eight Hellraiser films (there are ten altogether with a TV



series currently in production!). Complicating matters we discover that Boone is now responsible for saving Midian's wretched inhabitants. Handy since ancient prophecies inform us that we are the chosen one, the saviour of the freaky outcasts.

Lylesberg: What is below, stays below. That is the Law.



Huh, a lot like Fight Club then. Heading underground the game switches into Dungeon Master RPG-lite mode, controlled by clicking on directional arrows and run/fight buttons. Here we're tasked with mapping out the labyrinthine tunnels in order to track down and rescue five key members of the tribe.



*In Nightbreed lore, Berzerkers are genetically altered WWI prisoners/soldiers dreamt up by German scientists as alternative, occult weapons. Any remnants of the army that weren't slain by the German High Command having gone berserk fled to Midian to seek shelter.*

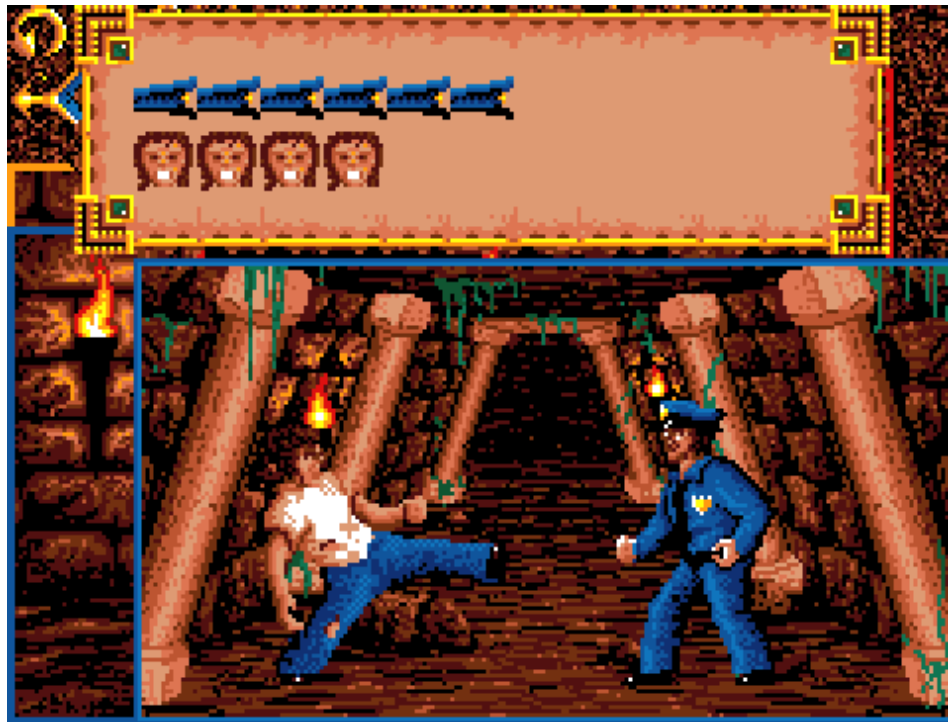
Which would be child's play if it wasn't for at every turn bumping into Sons of the Free Nazi militants (also seen in the 'action' game), Berzerkers (normally restrained in 'The Holdings'), and the deranged double-dealing Doc Decker.

Dr Philip K. Decker: (smirking) Quite a dance huh? Death everywhere and you and me in the middle!





Xenophobic Sons of the Free are dealt with by flipping into beat 'em up mode, hammering the fire button to perform kicks and punches. If we can land more blows than our opponent they keel over, allowing us to go on our way.



Some critics have suggested that this anti-breed sentiment is a metaphor for the abuse and prejudice endured by the LGBT community. Much more so in 1988 when the Cabal novella was written. I'd like to think that society is a bit more open-minded towards diversity today.



Other vigilantes are armed with a laser-sighted rifle targeted at our forehead. Evade their red dot for a short while and they slink away again into the gloom, leaving us alone for five minutes. If you're familiar with the relevant scene in the movie you'll recall that it's Lylesberg who is shot dead between the eyes by one of the rampaging Sons of the Free, not Boone.



Berzerkers all take the form of the airborne 'Ferreal Vees' manta ray that avenged the death of Lylesberg in the movie.



*Smile for the kiddies at home. You're on camera!*

Immune to our punches and kicks these razor-sharp-toothed critters must instead be swerved. Duck when they travel overhead and jump when underfoot.



If we can ride out their incursion for long enough they eventually give up, likely toddling off to pull little girl's pigtails and kill excitable Australian TV presenters.



*'Crocodile Hunter' Steve Irwin. It turns out that he likely would have survived had he not yanked out the stinger barb that caused him to bleed to death in 2006. :(*





"Ocean's approach to this license is certainly original and the game shows off the ST's graphics, but it holds no lasting appeal. For 25 quid you're getting little more than a few animated sections from the film, so save your money and go to the cinema instead."

### **ST Format (58%, November 1990)**

Exploration of the bewilderingly similar catacombs eventually gives way to a platforming segment that requires us to leap inhuman distances up or down chasms to reach the various elevations of this Midian hell-hole.

Luckily it's fairly forgiving, offering a leg up if we don't quite make it to a ledge - touch the edge and Boone grips it, hauling himself up like Prince of Persia. Linger too long however and the ledges crumble to dust, causing us to plummet back down to the floor. Accordingly, mistime our jumps and Boone ricochets off the walls, eventually sustaining critical damage. Naturally, going down is a fair bit easier.



*It looks like graphics artist John Beard has been down here too. He shouldn't really be desecrating the holy walls though.*

*Ah well, I'll forgive him; Some of the comic book style artwork in Nightbreed is really impressive. I'd give Baphomet a hug, wouldn't you? It must be a lonely life, being a statue.*

Upon locating the last of the mislaid Nightbreed clan the game ends, culminating in a visit to The Tabernacle where the Tribes of the Moon's almighty deity, Baphomet, resides. We're informed that as the one who brought death and destruction to their sanctorium - now baptised as Cabal - we must find the Nightbreed a new home where they will be safe from the prejudices of the 'normal' world. Call it the 'promised land' if you like.

"Despite excellent presentation, Nightbreed suffers from being somewhat shallow in its gameplay. Although there is a lot to see, the challenge is rather lessened by the

fact that all the puzzles can be solved using a trial and error system. All in all, Nightbreed falls just short of the mark and rates as a disappointing piece of software."

**Amiga Computing (no score, December 1990)**



Constituting over 100 screens, the assets occupying 4mb worth of data, Nightbreed: the interactive movie sounds impressive on paper. In practice it's far too lightweight, repetitive and frustrating to be a laudable accompaniment to the convoluted novel that turned the horror genre on its head, forcing us to reassess the presumption that grotesque naturally equals evil.

Progression largely rests upon trial and error choices rather than skill or critical thinking. Pure masochistic perseverance, diligent mapping and an immeasurable number of 'back to the drawing board' restarts are demanded to complete the ordeal. If you're not using save states via an emulator and

playing over the course of several years you must be crazier than our headless chum Narcisse. I wouldn't *normally* recommend taking illegal hallucinogenic drugs to get you through the trials and tribulations of life in a hellish subterranean crypt... \*snip\*



*Is that a smiley face lurking in the bottom right corner? I knew THEY were laughing at us from the undergrowth. Always there, stalking, sniggering, reporting back...*